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# Before and After Tlatelolco: On Violence, Experience, and Living to Write About It

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## **Before and After Tlatelolco: On Violence, Experience, and Living to Write About It**

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The chronicler who narrates events without distinguishing between major and minor events acts in accord with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost to history.

“There are no countries without fairy tales lurking in their shadows,” writes Pablo Ignacio Taibo II in the preface to his book '68. The text is a collection of essays or fragments of memory in an attempt to record the student movement that culminated in the massacre of hundreds of protestors in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas/Tlatelolco in Mexico City on October 2, 1968. The use of the term ‘fairy tales’ is striking, as Taibo is clearly not thinking of the kind of fairy tales generally associated with Disney princesses. Rather, his usage seems more in line with the definition offered by Jack Zipes in *When Dreams Came True*:

Oral and literary fairy tales...emanate from specific struggles to humanize bestial and barbaric forces that have terrorized our community in concrete ways, threatening to destroy free will and human compassion. The fairy tale sets out...to conquer this concrete terror...and provide hope that social and political conditions can be changed. (1-2)

At the same time, the focus of Taibo’s work adheres closely to that of Benjamin’s chronicler, and for similar reasons: so that his experiences and memories of the events are not lost to history.

This essay will examine three works by Mexican writers, all of which address the events of the Mexican student movement from roughly July through October of 1968: *Palinuro of Mexico*, by Fernando de Paso; *La noche de Tlatelolco*, from Elena Poniatowska (the English

translation is titled *Massacre in Mexico*); and '68 from Paco Ignacio Taibo II. *Palinuro* is a dense, phantasmagoric, Joycean work of fiction; for the sake of brevity, I will be focusing on the twenty-fourth chapter since it most directly addresses the events of the Movement and Tlatelolco. Poniatowska's work is a compilation of photographs and oral histories, and Taibo's '68 is a collection of diary-like essays that he initially intended to develop into a novel but could not, explaining, "It's probably a novel that does not want to be written" (11). Despite the authors' different approaches, certain key commonalities emerge: the importance of memory, the search for the truth (along with the attempt to define slippery words like "truth" and "real"), and the insistence that others must listen, hear, and remember.

My intention is to show how all three authors use varied techniques of representation to achieve the position of chronicler as defined by Walter Benjamin. Reading these works in a sort of Benjaminian constellation, I will attempt to answer the following questions: how do the Mexican pieces line up (or not) with Benjamin's writings on violence, experience, memory, and history? Can anything new be revealed by such a juxtaposition? It seems to me that experience, memory, and history are all very closely connected; what is the effect of violence on this experience, memory, and history according to Benjamin? Does that effect play out as Benjamin suggests in the writings addressed here, and what conclusions may be drawn from the resulting similarities and/or differences? Finally, assuming that the lines of fiction and historiography are always already blurred<sup>1</sup>, where may Benjamin's history be found in each text? Before going much further, however, a brief summary of the events of 1968 in Mexico is in order.

Nineteen sixty-eight was a globally tumultuous year; in the subtitle of his book *1968*, Mark Kurlansky calls it "the year that rocked the world." Mexico was enjoying a period of

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<sup>1</sup> See Hayden White's *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1973.

economic growth and getting ready to host the summer Olympics in October. The president, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, while publicly expressing confidence about Mexico's political and economic situation and stability, privately feared that there was a global conspiracy of French and Cuban radicals out to spread disorder around the world. His paranoia was fueled by student protests in France in May of that year and the rise in Communist furor provoked by the death of the Argentine revolutionary Ernesto "Che" Guevara the previous year. Díaz Ordaz's sentiments were closely aligned with his political party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, which will henceforth be referred to as the PRI): the party valued stability over democracy, and had a habit of buying off dissidents, locking them up, or killing them (Kurlansky 328).

In this environment, the Movement erupted in late July; as Taibo recalls, "It is generally agreed that the Movement was ignited on 26 July 1968, but as always in real history, the igniters did not know at the time what it was they were igniting" (24). Four days before, a fight had broken out between two local high schools; the police and antiriot units, who had been called in to keep in peace, instead began to provoke the students. When the students tried to retreat to their schools, the military gave chase, assaulting students and teachers alike. On July 26, a group of students marching to protest the police brutality of a few days before ran into an annual march of Fidel Castro's supporters; the army again took the offensive against both groups. The battle would continue for days in the streets of Mexico City. Taibo, who at 19 was already a veteran of such protests, was part of the student protest on that day. "This was not the first time we had been beaten up by the cops. It was one of the Mexican state's demented customs to give the students a bit of stick every now and again, just to show them who was boss" (27). Still, even he noted a change in the scale and scope of the official response to the student resistance

movements that worried him: “All the same, this was different: what were they cooking up now?” (ibid.)

As the military violence increased, the student protest groups became more organized and more resistant, which made Díaz Ordaz increasingly nervous. He promised the world that the Olympics would be peaceful and undisturbed: “We will do what we have to” (Kurlansky 338). On October 2, the National Strike Council (Consejo Nacional de Huelga, or CNH) met with the government to attempt to resolve the conflicts through dialogue. It ended badly. A rally was scheduled at Tlatelolco immediately afterwards for the CNH representatives to share the results of the talk; a large crowd had formed there. Kurlansky explains the layout:

Tlatelolco consists of a flagstone-paved plaza surrounded on two sides by the black stone and white mortar walls of a considerable complex of Aztec ruins. The church also faces the plaza on one of these sides. In the front and on the other side are housing projects. The building in front, the Edificio Chihuahua, has an open-air hallway on the third floor where people can stand in front of a waist-high concrete wall and look out at the plaza. It is the kind of place an experienced political organizer would not choose. The police had only to block a few passageways between buildings and the plaza would be sealed off. (340)

As the speeches began, helicopters appeared, men in white gloves and weapons burst into the plaza, and gunfire erupted from the ground level and the balconies; the firing would continue for two hours. Forty years later, no confirmed body count exists; the most reliable estimates hover around three hundred, with thousands detained, imprisoned, and tortured<sup>2</sup>. In the Mexican paper

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<sup>2</sup> Kurlansky 324; “AI demanda reabrir indagación sobre el ‘68” (Amnesty Internacional demands that investigations be reopened regarding [the events of] ‘68”, *El Universal*, 2 October 2008; Steele 5.

*El Universal* on October 2, 2008, debates still raged over who was behind it, how many were killed, and what the country should learn from it.

Taibo was perhaps the closest to the Movement; as the youngest of the three writers (b. 1949), he was directly involved in a leftist Communist student group in Mexico City in the late 1960s. His entire account could be paraphrased thus: *Of course I remember. I couldn't forget if I wanted to.* Even though he waited twenty years to begin to convert his notebooks into something printable, he says,

I never fell victim to amnesia. ... [A]fter twenty years, the *only* thing that works is memory. Collective memory, but also even the tiniest, most insignificant memory of a personal kind. I suspect, in fact, that the one can barely survive without the other, that legend cannot be constructed without anecdote. That there are no countries without fairy tales lurking in their shadows. (9)

The notebooks, he tells us, were begun for his daughter, so that she might find them in case of his death. By that it may be inferred that he has not talked to her about his experiences, nor does he plan to. The act of publishing them, however, indicates a desire to contribute his version of events, his anecdotes, to the construction of the myth of Tlatelolco.

I would assert that this combination of legend and anecdote, of fairy tale and essay, finds its roots in, or at least common ground with, Benjamin's idea of experience. "[E]veryone knew precisely what experience was: older people had always passed it on to younger ones" (*Experience and Poverty* 731). He emphasizes that this experience is passed on orally; writing it down is simply not the same. While these experience-stories are directed to younger listeners, there is nothing childish about them, and their listeners were not necessarily children, just younger than the storyteller. Fairy tales, too, are based in the oral tradition; like experience-

stories, they are not only intended for children. The difference, however, lies in the idea of poverty. Benjamin avers that, from World War I onward, “experience has fallen in value” (731); that is, the gap between these two generations is so abrupt and so wide that the experience of the older generation is incomprehensible and irrelevant to the younger ones. Fairy tales, however, are based in the idea of accessible metaphor, so the potency of the stories remains; the past is brought into the present, thus (presumably) allowing for intergenerational communication (Zipes 1). The violence of the First World War, the increasingly accelerated pace of modernity and the ensuing generation gap seem to have been the causes of this particular silence and impoverishment of experience. It might be worthwhile, then, to examine what constitutes a silencing violence.

Benjamin speaks to this in his “Critique of Violence” in which he defines violence as a product of a society in which experience has been radically impoverished. He designates two kinds of violence, mythic and divine. The Tlatelolco massacre would fall squarely under mythical violence: it is law-making, sets boundaries, threatens, is bloody, demands sacrifice, is pernicious, and preserves that which is administrative (248). The Mexican government and military would often target the friends and family of the person they were actually after, recalling the murder of Niobe’s children as punishment for her actions, leaving her as the “eternally mute bearer of guilt” (ibid). In Taibo’s case, what seems to haunt him most is that, despite his active involvement in the Movement, he was *not* at Tlatelolco on October 2, since his frightened father had sent him to Madrid only the day before. Taibo was literally struck dumb: “I lost my voice. Hysterical mutism, the doctor called it. The doctor didn’t understand that the Movement had struck me dumb as a punishment. I was not entitled to speak, because I had not been there” (106). Tellingly, the title of this particular chapter is “Everyone Blames Themselves—Forever”

(ibid.). Guilt, or more specifically, survivor's guilt, seems to play a role in this silence provoked by violence.

Although Taibo does not speak of what happened to him, it should be noted that his writing style approximates that of an oral history; the sentences are short, often fragmented, and the tone is generally quite familiar: slang, profanities, and interjections abound. He begins with a barrage of questions, most of which make little sense to the uninitiated reader, detailed, pointed questions that range from the trivial ("Why did the Vocational School 5 always have the best coffee?") to the profound. ("How was the magic worked? ... How does a generation manufacture its myths?") The real question seems to be the last one, which he repeats three times, riffing on it, becoming more emphatic and more profane with each iteration: "Where did they throw our dead?" (12-3)

Taibo manages to answer most of his questions except for the last one; he seems to know that a once-and-for-all answer is unlikely, perhaps nonexistent. Still, I would suggest that he employs this particular strategy, this series of anecdotes, to combat the silence imposed by the mythic violence he endures; in other words, he defies the government's mythic violence with a myth of his own: "the antiauthoritarian myth of the Movement, along with the accompanying bloody-mindedness with which that Movement fought for democracy. I am in favor of saying it again: It is not over yet" (130). Twenty-five years afterward, he is convinced of the strength of his own mythical weapon against the PRI, which despite everything is still in charge: "Because, when you get right down to it, this is a myth that gives them a major pain in the ass" (ibid.) Recalling Zipes, "The fairy tale sets out...to conquer this concrete terror...and provide hope that social and political conditions can be changed" (2). Here myth, legend, and fairy tale merge; the terror is not conquered, but it is articulated. This articulation serves to combat the potentially



silencing violence of that day, but it does not lead to resolution. Taibo layers on the epilogues, which suggests that he still seeks closure; the first epilogue, written in 1988 with the other essays, melds fear and defiance, tears and laughter: “better to be Draculas of resistance than the PRI-ist monsters of Frankenstein, or of modernity” (122). In the second epilogue, in 1993, he is marching with his daughter, his comrades, and their children; twenty-five years later, the PRI remains in power and the student struggle continues, but they have not given up; the marchers are still trying to “come up with the best chants, [to] dream up the most really unreal country” (139). In the last epilogue, penned five years ago, Taibo is terse and to the point: progress has been made, but not enough. He and his comrades are back on the street marching and will continue to fight until justice is served. Hope remains, albeit grimly so.

Elena Poniatowska’s *La noche de Tlatelolco* was the first of the three works to be published; hers, according to the description on the jacket cover, is “a verb that will be *heard* more than *read*”<sup>3</sup>. For the first thirty pages or so, she writes very little; instead, black and white photos bombard the reader. The photos are captioned, guiding the reader’s eye and interpretation, but the printed word is meant to be processed after the fact: the images reach the eye first, and they are striking and often terrible, designed for maximum emotional impact. Many of the captions use an encapsulating “we” that embraces the reader. We fought, we were applauded, we resisted. Others take the form of questions. Under Díaz Ordaz’s picture: “Mr. President, how can you offer friendship to the countries of the world when we do not have it here?” (17-8) Beside photographs of bodies in the morgue and of a murdered child: “Who ordered this? Who could have ordered this? This is a crime” (29-30). The captions are uncredited, which implies that the ideas and reactions expressed are universal. While Poniatowska’s authorial voice is rarely explicitly ‘heard,’ her presence is constant; her hand is on the rudder, so to speak, as she guides

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<sup>3</sup> My translation. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Poniatowska’s work are my own.

us through this polyphonic historical journey. The oral testimonies are organized into two parts: Winning the Street and The Night of Tlatelolco.

I am not the first to employ Benjamin in a dialogue with Poniatowska's text; Diana Sorenson uses "Critique of Violence" as a starting point for her analysis of *La noche*: "The task of a critique of violence can be summarized as that of expounding its relation to law and justice" (54). The fragmentation of the testimonies may disorient the reader at first, but Poniatowska guides the process: "Reading—and piecing together—the stories and evaluating their ethical implications go hand in hand: the process involves configurational understanding together with an awareness of the moral significance attached to the events pulled together into the narrative constellation" (Sorenson 72). It is curious, however, that in Sorenson's linking of violence and aesthetics, that she does not consider the role of photography in Poniatowska's work to be art—only photojournalism, and sensationally manipulative photojournalism at that. While I agree that the arrangement of images and words feels clumsily manipulative forty years on and a country away from the massacre, I would also argue that subtlety was hardly Poniatowska's objective. Her work, published in 1971, is directed to a country that had largely been silenced by the events of that day: ambulances that came to the plaza on October 2 were not allowed in and had to turn off their sirens; photographers were not allowed to take pictures and were threatened, injured or killed by the army if they tried (275). As one imprisoned CNH member tells her, nearly two years later:

Yes, we think about Tlatelolco, but it's very hard for us to talk about it. ... I must confess I really don't like talking about Tlatelolco; in fact, I can't bring myself to talk about it...I'm sorry...please excuse me...I just can't...Here in Lecumburri

[the prison where arrested protesters were held after October 2] we say as little about it as possible, to keep ourselves from going crazy.

*Gilberto Guevara Niebla, of the CNH (161)*

She unites testimonials, texts, and images into a powerful collage that ‘speaks’ more loudly than any individual could, shattering the silence of the mythical violence enacted. I would argue that the idea is to say something, *anything*, rather than remain mute. In the introduction to the second section, she writes, “Grief is a very personal thing. Putting it into words is almost unbearable” (199), yet she does for those who will not or cannot do so. Upon putting these stories into words, other voices begin to reverberate in the text as well, recalling Benjamin’s rhetorical question: “In the voices we hear, isn’t there an echo of now silent ones?” (On the Concept of History, 390)

Poniatowska’s initial framing of the situation is curious: the students are coming toward her as happy, innocent children unaware of the bloody fate that awaits them: “There are many of them. They’re coming on foot, laughing. They came down through Melchor Ocampo, la Reforma, Juárez, Cinco de Mayo<sup>4</sup>, students walking arm in arm with the same joy as if they were going to a street fair” (13). All three accounts analyzed here, including hers, eventually thoroughly upend any idea of the university students as innocent angels; even the testimonials that Poniatowska collects show some of the rougher edges of those who speak, students and otherwise. Class conflict and discord become readily apparent, as does a generation gap: workers disapprove of the students; students fight among themselves; teenagers argue with parents. It should be noted that the violence is on both sides of the student-government conflict; the difference is in the kind of violence employed and the reasons for which it is used. The students’ actions fall under the category of the proletariat general strike, in which the group “sets itself the

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<sup>4</sup> All are main streets in Mexico City.

sole task of destroying state power” (Critique on Violence 246). In Mexico, the Movement’s objectives were condensed into six points:

1. Freedom for all political prisoners.
2. Revocation of Article 145 of the Federal Penal Code<sup>5</sup>.
3. Disbandment of the corps of *granaderos*.<sup>6</sup>
4. Dismissal of the police officials Luis Cueto, Raúl Mendiola, and A. Frías.
5. Payment of indemnities to the families of all those killed and injured since the beginning of the conflict.
6. Determination of the responsibility of individual government officials implicated in the bloodshed. (Poniatowska 53)

President Díaz Ordaz found their requests entirely unacceptable: “We have been so tolerant that we have been criticized for our excessive leniency, but there is a limit to everything, and the irremediable violations of law and order...cannot be allowed to continue” (Poniatowska 45). His statement, delivered on September 1, 1968, concurs with Benjamin’s assessment that “law sees violence in the hands of individuals as a danger undermining the legal system” (Critique of Violence 238). Benjamin’s worries about the police force seem justified in this particular environment as well, since “in this authority the separation of lawmaking and law-preserving is suspended. ... Rather, the “law” of the police really marks the point at which the state...can no longer guarantee through the legal system the empirical ends that it desires at any price to maintain. ...All violence is either lawmaking or law-preserving. If it lays claim to neither of these predicates, it forfeits all validity” (243). There are no trials or juries held, no lawyers

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<sup>5</sup> This code prohibited public protest gatherings and justified the violence used on the students.

<sup>6</sup> The *granaderos* were the special police forces or riot squads, named for the grenades (*granadas*) they used to carry as weapons. These corps tended to attack without provocation.

consulted in the plaza or in Lecumburri prison. Could *invalidity* be another element in silencing violence?

The Olympic Games went off with hardly a hitch; tourists and locals alike noted the sudden return to law and order.

Everything was so carefully planned, such enormous sums of money were spent, that not a single detail was overlooked; even the tickets for each event has been designed with the greatest good taste; and the same is true of the signs, the brochures, the printed programs...and every event has begun exactly on time. It was all beautifully organized...

*Beatriz Colle Corcuera, graphic arts designer and artist (308)*

What struck me most was that a week afterward, the Olympic Games began amid at least the outward appearance of perfect calm, as though nothing had happened. ...What in any other country would have been quite enough to unleash a civil war has resulted here in Mexico in nothing more than a few tense days immediately following... I don't understand it. What was the reason for it? Nor do I understand why everyone has remained silent.

*Claude Kiejman, correspondent for Le Monde, Paris (314)*

Given that *La noche* insists so vehemently on the oral nature of the testimonials gathered, can Poniatowska's work be considered an approximation to an experience-text? Not all of the text is drawn from oral testimony; textual framing has been employed with slogans from posters, graffiti found on walls, quotes from opinion editorials in the newspapers, sound recordings, and poems and texts written before and after October 2. Still, her application of the oral label to the

compiled text could easily be read as an attempt to write not just a single experience-story, but a complicated, tangled, yet powerful web of experience stories that crisscross and reinforce or contradict one another. Cynthia Steele does not hesitate to classify *La noche* as documentary fiction, complete with heroes (students) and villains (Díaz Ordaz and minister of the interior Luis Echeverría, who gave the order to fire) (30). According to David Herzberger's analysis, the documentary fiction approach is a powerful one:

For many novelists, indeed, it insinuates the capacity of discourse to open narration to difference and to deepen the resonances of dissent. The telling of multiple stories to enhance what Walter Benjamin refers to as the utilitarian component of history (the giving of counsel for future understanding) is thus seen as crucial. (2)

Neither Poniatowska nor Taibo make any attempt at presenting an objective text; both keep their distance from Benjamin's historical materialist puppet.

In contrast, *Palinuro of Mexico*, often compared to James Joyce's *Ulysses*, makes no attempt at realism whatsoever. Del Paso's novels are "cerebral, self-conscious, and playful, indulging...in linguistic games and minute listings of objects and attributes, which are intended to communicate the infinite variety of human experience" (Steele 69). The length and complexity of his novels (each one is around 500-600 pages long and took the better part of a decade to write) defy simple reduction; *Palinuro* can best be described as an obsessive exploration of the human body in an explicitly Mexican historical context. In the twenty-fourth chapter, "Palinuro on the Stairs," Del Paso attempts to dodge a problem that has dogged many realist novels and short stories that attempt to address the student movement and the massacre of 1968. "The danger in naturalistically representing events that are so highly charged, both politically and

emotionally, is that the text may lapse into melodrama or into an oversimplified portrayal of heroes and villains” (Steele 71).

Regarding his attempts to avoid tripping over the thin line of realism into melodrama, it may be to his advantage that Del Paso writes from a greater temporal and emotional distance than either Poniatowska or Taibo; he began *Palinuro* in 1969, writing from Mexico, the U.S., and London, and did not finish it until 1977. Consequently, his novel lacks the urgency of Poniatowska’s testimonials and the raw, personal anguish of Taibo’s essays. Instead, Del Paso writes the chapter in the style of the *commedia dell’arte*<sup>7</sup>, immersing the characters in a surreal and theatrical alternative universe. Del Paso explained his choice in a 1981 interview.

The student movement itself had a great deal of farce about it. But it wasn’t the students who were farceurs but rather many political groups, as well as individuals, who tried... to capitalize on the movement. Farce, irony, paradox also occurred in the massacres themselves: The soldiers, who...come from the lower classes—they are the people—confronted petit bourgeois students who were trying to vindicate that people... The confusion and panic that surrounded that frustrated attempt at revolution which led to nothing added a melodramatic and tragicomic tone to the situation. Farce, then, was the only road that I could take.

(ctd. in Steele 72)

The drama produced is surreal, grotesque, and absurd, producing a near-Brechtian sense of estrangement, with various apparitions of Death presiding over the entire spectacle; the “reality” (*Palinuro*, the main character, who is beaten and eventually shot and killed by policemen at

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<sup>7</sup> Del Paso draws from a 16th century tradition of Italian improvised drama that uses stock characters (among them the Doctor, the Harlequin, the Captain, and the Zanni, or jesters) and intermingles scandal, romantic intrigue, and irreverent farce. For more detailed information, see Robert Henke’s *Performance and Literature in the Commedia dell’arte* (Cambridge UP, 2002).

Tlatelolco) and fantasy, played out by the stock commedia dell'arte characters: Harlequin, Scaramouch, Pierrot, Colombine, etc. Despite his deliberate structural distance from the events that he narrates, I do not wish to imply that Del Paso approaches the chapter or the novel as a disinterested onlooker. Instead, he shifts, somewhat uneasily, from black humor to genuine tragedy. He pokes fun at President-Death with increasingly absurd and invented adverbs:

LA-MUERTE-PRESIDENTE: ¡Yo, como un solo hombre soy y seré el único responsable de las medidas adoptadas por las autoridades para salvar el honor y la paz de México! ¡Yo, el único responsable desde el punto de vista histórico, político, sociológico, antropológico, económico...

PANTALONE Y EL DOTTORE: Burocrático, salútfiero, filatético...

EL CAPITANO: Policíaco, lacrimógeno, estilográfico...

PIERROT Y COLOMBINA: Histérico, trompalógico, tuertológico...

ARLEQUÍN Y SCARAMOUCHE: ¡Dientológico, cabronológico e hijodelachingadalógico!

LA-MUERTE-PRESIDENTE: ¡Sí, señor: Yo como un solo hombre! (581)

When the farcical mask slips, the results can be clumsy or poignant. Earlier in the commedia, the symbolism and message are painfully clear:

*Pantalone y el Capitano se levantan y salen corriendo. Entra Colombine disfrazada de Constitución, Arlequín disfrazado de Revolución Mexicana, Scaramouche de Partido Revolucionario Institucional.*

COLOMBINA: ¡Oigan ustedes cómo se desmorona la Constitución!

SCARAMOUCHE: ¡Escuchen ustedes cómo se cuarteas el Partido Revolucionario Institucional!



ARLEQUÍN: ¡Oigan cómo se viene abajo la Revolución Mexicana!

PIERROT: ¡Sí, oigan, oigan, para que después no digan que no oyeron! (578-9)

The calls to listen, to hear, and to remember are always in the mouths of the stock commedia characters. A Motherland-Death appears, wailing for her lost children; she and voices from the audience echo Taibo's question: "Where have they taken [the dead]? We want to know where!" (534). No definitive answer is given.

Benjamin's analysis of Brechtian theatre reveals elements utilized in Del Paso's chapter, which alternates between the commedia and "reality" in a constant interruption of sequences. This constant interruption "has the character not of a stimulant but of an organizing function" (The Author as Producer 778), applying a narrative arc, however surreal, to the events relayed. Such theatre, says Benjamin, "is concerned less with filling the public with feelings, even seditious ones, than with alienating it in an enduring way, through thinking, from the conditions in which it lives" (779). Ideally, the reader is then spurred to reflect on and remember the past. Given the length and complexity of *Palinuro*, it is fairly safe to say that any reader who has made it that far is likely to be a more contemplative sort in the first place. While it seems to me that Del Paso vacillates somewhat between trying to provoke thought and yanking on the reader's heartstrings, this same vacillation never lets the reader get comfortable in either position, further heightening the sense of estrangement and reflection.

All three texts analyzed here employ several of the same techniques, albeit in different ways. All three authors write in a way that evokes orality: Taibo through a subjective, conversational first-person narrative; Poniatowska through a series of oral testimonials, and Del Paso via the pretense of a play. In doing so, I would suggest that they are getting around the impoverishment of experience-stories that is caused by violence-producing silence. No one

speaks, but the texts evoke the spoken word; mythic violence is enacted, but all three authors respond with myths of their own to counteract the official story and seek justice. In Benjamin's essay "On the Concept of History," the ideal chronicler who can record "the fullness of [the] past" is only granted to "a redeemed mankind" (390). Benjamin does not imply that the chronicler is instrumental in this redemption. In the case of the three Mexican chroniclers examined here, however, I would assert that all three are explicitly seeking such redemption, and that this redemption is only possible when sought collectively rather than individually. "Each moment [a redeemed mankind] has lived becomes a *citation à l'ordre du jour*. And that day is Judgment Day" (ibid.). Forty years later, those responsible for the Tlatelolco massacre have not been punished; Díaz Ordaz, for example, later worked as an ambassador in Spain and died of old age. Taibo, Poniatowska, and Del Paso have contributed their histories and truths surrounding the events of 1968 in hopes of someday achieving that judgment and redemption.

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